

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-11 (Cancelled)

Claim 12. (Currently Amended) An ear tag for marking and identifying animals, the ear tag including a male tag component, a female tag component and a sampling device, wherein comprising:

a) ~~a~~ the male tag component ~~with~~ includes a punch that, in use, perforates ~~the~~ an animal's ear and penetrates into a hollow head of ~~a~~ the female tag component under the action of an applicator tool having jaws,

b) ~~the female tag component is provided with a sampling device, which has a sampling device for~~ includes an absorbent material, is fixed in a non-permanent manner to the female tag component and is arranged such that, in use, when the punch penetrates an animal's ear and penetrates into the hollow head of the female tag component, the punch passes through the absorbent material, the sampling device thereby sampling biological material extracted from the ear of the animal when it is pierced by the punch, said sampling device extending laterally to the female tag component and is ~~being~~ separable therefrom, and

c) the sampling device further ~~including~~ includes an attachment for fixing the sampling device to one of the jaws of the applicator tool whereupon, during use, opening of the jaws and/or ~~its~~ removal of the applicator tool from the animal's ear separates the sampling device from the female tag component.

Claim 13. (Currently Amended) The ear tag according to claim 12, wherein the

absorbent material is disposed transversely to ~~the a~~ direction in which, in use, the ~~male~~ punch of the male tag component penetrates through the animal's ear and to ~~the an~~ axis of ~~the a~~ hollow head of the female tag component, the sampling-absorbent material being posterior to ~~the ear a~~ wall of the animal's ear.

Claim 14. (Currently Amended) The ear tag according to claim 12 ~~or 13~~ wherein the absorbent material is a sampling strip, one end of which is fixed to the attachment and the other is located transverse to the direction of penetration of the punch through the animal's ear.

Claim 15. (Currently Amended) The ear tag according to claim 14 wherein the absorbent material is connected by one of its ends transversely to ~~the an~~ interior of the hollow head of the female tag ~~panel-component~~ and by its other end to said attachment.

Claim 16. (Previously Presented) The ear tag according to claim 14 wherein the attachment is fixed onto the periphery of the hollow head of the female tag component.

Claim 17. (Currently Amended) The ear tag according to claim 16 wherein the attachment and sampling device ~~are~~ include a slit over an opening of the hollow head of the female tag component.

Claim 18. (Previously Presented) The ear tag according to claim 15 wherein the attachment is fixed onto the periphery of the hollow head of the female tag component.

Claim 19. (Currently Amended) The ear tag according to claim 18 wherein the attachment and the sampling device ~~are~~include a slit over an opening of the hollow head of the female tag component.

Claim 20. (Currently Amended) Ear tag according to claim 12 ~~or 13~~ wherein the male tag component and the female tag component each include a panel, the panels and the attachment being each provided with identical symbols for marking and identification.